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“A Tattling Town like Windsor”: Negotiating Proper Relations in Frances Burney’s *Early Court Journals and Letters* (1786–87)

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Six months after her arrival at court as keeper of the robes to Queen Charlotte, Frances Burney discovered that before her appointment, the queen’s opinion of her had not always been so positive. Madame la Fite, reader to the queen and instructress to the princesses in French and German, whom Burney had met through their mutual friends the Lockes, had, she found, “extolling me to all she could induce to hear her, constantly *offered* me” to her acquaintance, “& told them that the *charmante Auteur de Cecile* was vraiment *l’heroine d’un Roman!*”:

And this which to the Queen’s cool Judgment sounds a Character of romantic affectation & flightiness, was what she asserted of me so strongly after our first meeting at Norbury Park [the Lockes’s home], that her Majesty frankly told me she had conceived, from that time, an idea of me so little to her satisfaction, that it had taken from her all desire ever to see me, till she heard of me again from Mrs. Delany.¹

Seeing Burney at Mrs. Delany’s, however, helped to convince the queen that giving her “such a character in the World” was “unjust, & . . . injurious,” and thus the possibility of her appointment came about (2:69).² Such

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a character—of “affectation,” if not of “flightiness”—was one that others would suspect in Burney, however, and the idea of Burney as a novelistic heroine in her own journals and letters is something that readers have noted with both sympathy and hostility. Lady Llanover, daughter of Mrs. Delany’s niece Georgiana Mary Ann Port (known as “Marianne”), with whom Burney spent so much time in her first two years at court, is perhaps one of Burney’s most notable (and vicious) critics.³ In *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs. Delany* (1861–62), she writes that

Miss Burney was elated to such a degree by the appointment [at court] that she gradually lost all consciousness of her actual or relative position. She lived in an ideal world of which she was, in her own imagination, the centre. She believed herself possessed of a spell which fascinated all those she approached. She became convinced that all the equerries were in love with her, although she was continually the object of their ridicule, as they discovered her weaknesses and played upon her credulity for their own amusement.⁴

Much more sympathetically, but in a vein not entirely unrelated, Lorna Clark has suggested recently that through the “empowering nature” of writing, Burney in her journals “could be the heroine of her own epistolary novel, the most important person in the room, flirted with by all the men, feted by the literati, loved by sweet Hester Thrale, doted on by Johnson, feared by the Blues, favored by the queen, and so on.”⁵ Clark argues persuasively that Burney’s journals and letters exhibit a narrative structuring “that, no less than three times, yearns to take the form of a courtship journal but is resisted by reality” in the cases of George Owen Cambridge and Stephen Digby, “until, the final and third time,” with Alexandre d’Arblay, “it comes to fruition” (“Epistolarity, 199”).⁶

While Lady Llanover finds Burney crassly delusional, for Clark she is in need of the kind of compensation it seems we all crave: “Mankind cannot bear very much reality. Through her pen, Burney seeks to insulate herself from too much reality, from the possibility of failure. She writes to survive, to retell, in bearable form, her life’s story” (“Epistolarity,” 216). While clearly defending Burney from the sort of patently unkind and class-ridden judgment Lady Llanover indulges in, Clark’s argument to some extent tacitly confirms that judgment’s implications, but without condemning Burney. By “insulat[ing] herself from too much reality,” Burney may be tending towards an “ideal world” of her own imagination. The censorious Victorian

and sympathetic modern reader come to a similar conclusion about Burney, but from different directions and with different motivations.

The court journals, as Joyce Hemlow pointed out many years ago, were “not a private, but a semi- or mock-private communiqué.” Addressed to Burney’s sister Susan and their close friend Frederica Locke, “extracts at least . . . would be in public reading in Norbury Park.” Written up some time later (perhaps many months), from memoranda made at the time of the events, they comprised “not a day-to-day account but a selection of such incidents as were likely to afford interest or amusement.”⁷ It is clear that Burney consciously created narratives of “such incidents” to distract herself from the profound misery of her court life, especially from passages omitted from early editions but available since the publication of the recent edition of the *Court Journals and Letters* in 2011.⁸ One such passage comes towards the end of the Oxford journal, an account of the royal visit in August 1786 that took place soon after the attempted assassination of George III. Much quoted and admired over the years, the Oxford journal is informative, lively and, occasionally, frankly funny. Towards the end, Burney explains that she has been “very minute” in her account of the visit both because “it presented scenes so new to me,” and because the usual inflexible routine of court life means that “after you have had a month or two of general Journal, you will have nothing more to be new to either of us.” In a paragraph cut from Barrett’s and Dobson’s editions, she continues:

Should I—by that time,—be arrived at a firmer state of Mind, I may write to my beloved Susan & Fredy without wanting *Facts* or *Narrations*, & only from the sources of *Thoughts & Affections*. . . . But I now fly them both!—& while I keep both at distance, my spirits recover.—The moment they approach,—those spirits are again gone!—I will harden myself all that I can, it is now my constant, serious aim. (1:127)

The extent to which she is still struggling to “harden” herself then becomes clear at the end of the journal for November that year, in another passage omitted from the earlier editions:

In writing *Facts & circumstances*, I have wholly omitted the state of my Mind,—& let me omit it still—omit—Good God!—I cannot write about that time!—Forget it too, my beloved Susan—forget it, my sweet simpathising Fredy!—to recollect what You suffered for me then,—for me & by me,—is of all my recollections the most painful! (1:272)⁹

1 In these passages, “*Facts or Narrations*,” “Facts & circumstances,” are pre-
 2 sented as providing a cover or distraction from “the state of my Mind.”
 3 Yet if the “*Facts or Narrations*” produced during her early years at court
 4 undoubtedly gave Burney a much-needed distraction from her unhappi-
 5 ness, this does not mean that they need also to be read primarily as helping
 6 her to insulate herself from reality, as stories told to escape a world she was,
 7 by implication, unable to face.

8 In this article, I read narrative performances Burney produced in her
 9 journals for 1786 and 1787, some of which are made widely available for
 10 the first time in the new edition of the court journals, not as compensa-
 11 tory (although I recognize the force and cogency of Clark’s argument),
 12 but rather as evidence of the dilemmas Burney felt she had to deal with as
 13 a single woman in a particular context, dilemmas that, rather than fuel-
 14 ing escapist fantasy, allowed her to reflect on practical problems of con-
 15 duct. In particular, to see her concern about the nature of her relationships
 16 with male courtiers as evidence of compensation is to overlook its material
 17 importance to a woman of Burney’s rank, upbringing, and temperament.

18 When Frances Burney arrived at court in July 1786, she was thirty-
 19 four. She was at once a celebrated novelist and an impecunious unmarried
 20 daughter, and the appointment was seen as providing for her as marriage
 21 would have done. Soon after arrival, she wrote in a much-quoted passage to
 22 her sister: “I am *married*, my dearest Susan,—I look upon it in that light,—
 23 I was averse to forming the union, & I endeavoured to escape it; but my
 24 friends interfered,—they prevailed—& the knot is tied” (1:8). If marriage
 25 is one metaphor for her situation, the other is that of the cloister. In Janu-
 26 ary 1787, in an effort to reconcile herself to her life at court, she resolved
 27 “to settle myself in my monastery, without one idea of ever quitting it;—to
 28 study for the approbation of my lady Abbess, & make it a principal source
 29 of content, as well as spring of action;—& to associate more cheerily with
 30 my surrounding Nuns & Monks” (2:25). Both metaphors tend to downplay
 31 Burney’s situation as a single woman in a mixed environment, an environ-
 32 ment, moreover, that was both in some ways highly restrictive and yet also
 33 disconcertingly unsupervised. In recovered passages of her journal, Burney
 34 reveals her anxiety about the lack of guidance given her about conduct,
 35 as in her lament, on the subject of receiving visits, after her first month’s
 36 service: “All I can do, is hold back to the utmost of my power, till I better
 37 understand with what propriety I may come forward” (1:142).¹⁰ Court life,
 38 with its apparently binding nature and demanding routines, certainly must
 39

1 have seemed a great deal like marriage or the cloister for Burney, but she
 2 had to negotiate it while carrying all of the personal and social baggage of
 3 being unmarried, and indeed, marriageable, despite her advancing age.¹¹
 4 Her scruples seem sometimes tortuous to modern readers and seemed so,
 5 indeed, to some of her contemporaries, but the advice of those whom she
 6 trusted—Mrs. Delany, Leonard Smelt, the queen apparently supported the
 7 validity of her concerns.¹² Lorna Clark has rightly noted the “potent but
 8 unacknowledged influence of sexuality” in the journals more generally; the
 9 discussions with these advisers that Burney recorded in her court jour-
 10 nals—determining questions such as whom may she visit, or receive in her
 11 own rooms? with whom should she correspond?—tacitly acknowledge the
 12 importance of conduct in court life and the care needed to avoid rumor and
 13 gossip (facets of existence there to which I shall return).¹³

14 If Burney struggled in her ignorance of court etiquette, especially at
 15 first, she also found that court custom put pressure on her own sense of
 16 propriety. Mrs. Schwollenberg, Burney's irascible fellow keeper of the robes
 17 and very soon the *bête noire* of her existence (whom she dubbed “Cer-
 18 bera” and found depressingly reminiscent of her unloved stepmother), was
 19 accustomed to entertaining the equerries to tea each evening.¹⁴ Burney was
 20 expected to be present but rapidly found she was also required to efface
 21 herself almost completely to avoid jealousy and aggression from her fellow
 22 keeper. The ill health that kept Mrs. Schwollenberg in London for much
 23 of the time between the end of September 1786 and mid June 1787 released
 24 Burney from the misery of Mrs. Schwollenberg's company, but her absence
 25 meant that Burney was now required to preside over the tea table.¹⁵ This
 26 was manageable while she was able to find another woman to keep her
 27 company, but distinctly unsettling if not.

28 Looking forward one afternoon to a tête-à-tête with Mrs. Delany,
 29 Burney was disappointed to receive another visitor, Miss Finch, in addi-
 30 tion; Mrs. Delany, however, was then (as very often happened) “carr[ied]
 31 away” to the queen:

32
 33 I had now, therefore, no one, but this Chance-comer, to assist me in doing
 34 the honours to my two Beaus [equerries Major Price and General Budé]:
 35 & well as I like their company, I by no means enjoyed the prospect of
 36 receiving them alone: —not, I protest, & am sure, from any prudery, but
 37 simply from thinking that a single Female, in a party either large or small,
 38 of Men, unless very much used to the World, appears to be in a situation
 39 awkward & unbecoming.¹⁶

1 When Miss Finch then rose to leave, Burney “was quite concerned,”

2
3 & frankly begged her to stay & help to recreate my Guests.—She was
4 very much diverted with this distress, which she declared she could not
5 comprehend, as she should have no sort of objection to receiving *any*
6 *quantity of Men* at any time herself, but frankly agreed to remain with me;
7 & promised, at my earnest desire, not to publish what I had confessed to
8 her, lest I should gain, around Windsor, the character of a Prude. (1:180)

9 The way in which Burney recounts this episode is worth consideration. She
10 denies “prudery,” while recognizing that if her feelings should be known,
11 she would be likely to “gain . . . the character of a Prude,” suggesting sub-
12 tle differences between the way Burney defines the word and its common
13 usage. John Gregory’s popular conduct book, *A Father’s Legacy to his Daugh-*
14 *ters* (1774), acknowledged that prudery was an accusation that young women
15 attempting to behave with propriety may have to contend with: “By prud-
16 ery is usually meant an affectation of delicacy. Now I do not wish you to
17 affect delicacy; I wish you to possess it. At any rate, it is better to run the
18 risk of being thought ridiculous than disgusting.”¹⁷ The relation of Bur-
19 ney’s work to conduct book advice has been much discussed; one notable
20 aspect of this passage is that Burney follows what might be seen as a “deli-
21 cate” concern at being put in a “situation awkward & unbecoming” with
22 a rather risqué remark.¹⁸ Whether the emphasis was Miss Finch’s as well,
23 or simply Burney’s in the writing, its inclusion is clearly “indelicate,” and it
24 was, unsurprisingly, excised in the earlier editions of the journals. Indeed,
25 many of the excisions made in Barrett’s edition can be seen as aimed at
26 removing such contradictory moments. Remarking “how often attention
27 paid to Burney, especially (though not exclusively) male attention, is the
28 constant subject and recurring theme of the journal-letters, even the main
29 organising principle,” Clark notes that this is “certainly at odds with the
30 projected image of the modest, decorous, easily abashed maiden” (“Epis-
31 tolarity,” 198).¹⁹ Moments like this suggest a more complicated “projected
32 image” in the journals, one that encompasses more fully the complexities of
33 being both delicate and knowledgeable, both “easily abashed maiden” and
34 woman of thirty-four.

35 Tea with the equerries is, as Clark points out, one of the main points
36 of narrative focus in the court journals, “unfold[ing] like a scene of roman-
37 tic comedy” (“Epistolarity,” 202). Yet, as Emily Hahn observed somewhat
38 acidly in her 1951 biography of Burney, “Days and pages of Diary were given
39

over to Fanny's futile, fluttering little intrigues to break away from the equerries at tea."²⁰ If Burney found that tea time provided fruitful material for exercising her skills in rendering lively dramatic dialogue for the entertainment of her readers, she also sought actively to escape it. Her journal for October 1786 records, upon her realizing that Mrs. Schwollenberg was likely to be absent for some time, the formation of "a grand design . . . to obtain to my own use the disposal of my Evenings" (1:200), but it was only in December of that year, when the current equerries' time was up and a new equerry arriving, that she made a concerted effort to follow through on her design: "Again I resolved to make a new effort for freedom. With a new Equerry would be the time; & the absence of Mrs Schwollenberg, & no plan being begun, & no custom pursued, made this my most promising opportunity" (1:314).²¹ Burney's plan was frustrated, however. Her advisers were not supportive; Mrs. Delany "totally disapproved" the plan: "Without the concurrence of the Queen, she said, no innovations ought to be risked, & as the King's attendants for so many Years had drank their Tea with the Queen's, she thought it could only pass for dissatisfaction, with their Majesties, to break the custom, & probably, for prudery, with the Gentlemen themselves" (2:14). Mr. Smelt, meanwhile, "did not seem to think this [the freeing of her evenings] very feasible, but said nothing positively against it" (2:68). These dampening responses from two of the people at court whose judgment Burney trusted most caused her to modify her plans. Her narrative of her attempts to free herself, and the failure of those attempts, centers on a figure who is at this point only just coming into prominence in her journals, and who forms the focal point of the ensuing discussion.

The Reverend Charles de Guiffardière, reader to the queen and teacher to the princesses, is first mentioned early on but very briefly as a "well-bred & sensible man" in the entry for July 19th 1786 (1:23). Although he remains a notable character in Barrett's and Dobson's editions, the latest edition of the court journals allows us to see that substantial passages in Burney's accounts of her conversations and difficulties with Guiffardière were omitted from the earlier versions, passages that contribute significantly to an understanding of the complex sexual tensions between them. Later, writing up her experiences months after they occurred, Burney introduced him to Susan and Fredy, and hinted about his increasing prominence in her life—or, at least, of his potential as material in her account of "Facts & circumstances" (1:272). She writes with a certain relish for the narrative potential such a subject offered:

1 Shall I introduce to you this Gentleman such as I now think him at once?
 2 or wait to let his Character open itself to you by degrees, & in the same
 3 manner that it did to me?—I wish I could hear your answer!—So capital
 4 a part as you will find him destined to play, hereafter, in my concerns,
 5 I mean, sooner or later, to the best of my power, to make you fully
 6 acquainted with him. (1:238)

7 Known as “Giffy” to the queen and princesses, the clergyman proved
 8 to be a more mercurial and unpredictable character than Burney had at
 9 first appreciated, and his code name became “Mr. Turbulent.”²² Clark has
 10 pointed out how the “exhausting scenes (of verbal, sometimes even phys-
 11 ical, conflict)” between Burney and Guiffardière are “described, as a clash of
 12 intellects and wills,” and sees them as fictionalized in a certain way, Burney
 13 playing the “embattled heroine” in a seduction narrative, suspicious “that
 14 the married clergyman may have a guilty predilection in her favour; the
 15 unstated sexual attraction is the source of energy and suspense. When his
 16 too-insistent attentions fade away, M. de Guiffardière too fades from the
 17 narrative (“Epistolarity,” 199). Yet this does not accurately reflect Burney’s
 18 presentation of her relationship with Guiffardière. Sexual tension there cer-
 19 tainly is, but it is more complex than Clark’s summary implies, as are the
 20 reasons for its “fading away.”

21 As Burney tells it, Guiffardière presented one of the key obstacles to the
 22 fulfillment of her desire to free her evenings, because he was determined
 23 that she should meet the new equerry, Colonel Greville. Burney presents
 24 Guiffardière as a chameleonlike figure, who shifts from an “importunate
 25 Casuist” (2:42) discomfiting Burney on the subject of religion, to a misan-
 26 thrope lamenting and “murmering on the ill condition of human life” (2:50),
 27 to “a mere mischievous *polisson* [naughty child]” (2:58). Finding that she has
 28 not met the new equerry and does not intend to do so, since she is hop-
 29 ing quietly to let drop the custom Mrs. Schwellenberg so rigidly followed,
 30 Guiffardière begins a teasing campaign to make her change her mind:

31 “You will not make the Tea, ma’am, & leave the Colonel out?”

32 “I have never had the Colonel *in*, Sir,—& therefore there is nothing
 33 peculiar in the omission.”

34 “And *why*, ma’am? *why* have you not?—there cannot be a more
 35 amiable man,—a man of manners, person, address, appearance, &
 36 conversation more pleasing,—more ... *enchanting*, ma’am!”

37 “I don’t at all doubt it, Sir,—”
 38
 39

1 "Shall I fetch him, then?"

2 "No, Sir.—"

3 "Vous avez donc peur?—" (2:42–43)

4 Such exchanges continue for a couple of weeks. At first Burney explains
5 that she "did not chuse to trust him with the motives for my proceedings,
6 which he might probably think affected, or else relate, to the Colonel him-
7 self, with whom he is very intimate, & draw inferences, and make com-
8 ments, very little to be desired" (2:51). At this early stage in her depiction
9 of him, she is not so much concerned about Guiffardière's possible interest
10 in her, although that is also implied, but rather his apparent mischievous
11 interest in insisting there is something personally significant in her avoid-
12 ance of Greville. When she does try to explain her desire for some time to
13 herself, Guiffardière exclaims that he perceives "nothing in all this but a
14 most extraordinary sympathy—for *Colonel Greville* also loves solitude!" and
15 then he cries "with affected solemnity" that he forebodes "something omi-
16 nous in all this!—What a meeting it may prove at last!" (2:54).

17 The meeting finally happened just a few days after this exchange, when
18 Guiffardière, in a "determined victory over my will & my wish" (2:62),
19 gleefully delivered a request from Mr. Smelt and Colonel Greville to join
20 Burney and Miss Planta at tea.²³ The scene is presented as one of comical
21 embarrassment; Burney "could almost have laughed, so ridiculous had the
22 behaviour of Mr. Guiffardière, joined to his presence & watchfulness, ren-
23 dered" it, and Colonel Greville "coloured violently on his entrance," con-
24 firming to her that Guiffardière "had been as busy with the Colonel about
25 me, as with me about the Colonel" (2:63). Once Guiffardière had witnessed
26 the "ominous" meeting, however, passages omitted from the earlier edi-
27 tions of the journals describe how he then proceeded to become theatri-
28 cally jealous of Greville, subjecting Burney when she spoke to him to "such
29 looks . . . of reproach & of watchfulness" that she can "scarcely help laugh-
30 ing" (2:100–01). His behavior became that of a neglected child,

31
32 quite wild to see me thus readily engaged in a separate conversation,
33 [Guiffardière] gave all the interruption in his power; He bent forward
34 every other minute with some new demand,—now more sugar—now more
35 cream—now it was too strong,—now too weak,—&, while he would not
36 suffer me to listen quietly, marked my being engaged so strongly, that I
37 saw, soon after, Major Price himself quite struck with attentive observation
38 to us. (2:102)

As so frequently happens in her novels, Burney renders this scene of domestic persecution with a fine sense of how the ludicrous shades into the distressingly uncomfortable. Politely imprisoned by the tea table, she is left hoping that Major Price's knowledge of Guiffardière's character will prevent the raising of "any rumours, or even shadow of a surmize upon such a subject" (2:102).

Burney's fear of rumor had its basis in past experience. Rumors had dogged her inconclusive relationship with George Owen Cambridge, even finding their way into print in early April 1783, when "a newspaper paragraph . . . coupled her name" with his.²⁴ Shortly after her anxiety about the "shadow of a surmize" developing, thanks to Guiffardière's actions, in relation to both her and Greville, Burney discovered that rumors had actually been circulating about the attention paid to her by Price, who had been one of the equerries in post when she began her service. Price was a good family friend of Burney's cousins in Worcester, to whom she was close, and so it was not surprising that the two struck up a cordial friendship. Price resigned from court service in October 1786 because of ill health, but this apparently had not prevented Colonel Manners, an equerry who had not even come to court until after the major's departure, picking up on the gossip and helping to keep it alive. When Price visited Windsor in June 1787, Burney had, she wrote, "the real provocation to receive immediate & indubitable proofs that the nonsense which had been told me concerning him, had not only reached him, but had made a deep impression upon his mind, & alteration in his conduct" (2:171). She was not at all under the impression that the major actually had any romantic feelings for her, and it seems quite clear that she experienced none of her own for him, but she was saddened that their friendship should suffer as a result of the rumors: "What a busy & meddling World it is!" (2:176), she exclaimed, concluding, "All this fuss & folly has much lessened my regret at his resignation" (2:185).

The gossip concerning Price and Burney had found its way from court out into the wider world, but the court itself was extremely fertile ground for rumor: as Rudolf M. Dekker has commented, "Sociological and historical studies have emphasized the importance of gossip in village communities. . . . As distinct social groups, royal courts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries can well be compared" to such communities.²⁵ Seen from this angle, Burney's anxieties and calculations while dealing with and within a "tattling Town like Windsor" (2: 218) are easy to understand, and they no longer appear overly dramatized or centered on her own status

as heroine. On February 27th, 1787, on the same occasion that had seen Guiffardière persecuting Burney at the tea table with endless requests for sugar, cream, and so on, Burney found herself alone with Colonel Greville when everyone else had dispersed. "I thought I might now," she explains, "without any charge of prudery, retire also to my Room; but Colonel Greville detained me, by begging . . . that he might remain where he was until Mr. Guiffardière returned." (Still the "charge of prudery" is a concern.) They then "sat, & chatted over the Company":

But when Mr. Guiffardière opened the Door—& saw only us two!—sitting in a social Tête à Tête—his looks—& his start—were really intolerable. . . . I was even afraid, so threatening was his countenance, & so unrestrained his Eyes, that he would have permitted speech also to his tongue,—& have said *what, alone together at last!* but he just forbore that. (2:104)

Instead, Guiffardière seated himself by the door, "quite aloof, while the Colonel's Chair was next to mine, & there sate silent, as if not to interrupt us." Omitted from the earlier editions of the journals, this episode elicited from Burney an anguished exclamation: "I *have* been so <scared>, my dearest Susan, where such behaviour was truly <cruel>!—Good God! What agitation have I suffered from it!—Here, however, it was merely alarming,—though even that was disagreeable enough to make me half angry" (2:104, emphasis in the original). It is unclear what precisely Burney refers to here, but more than likely she has in mind an incident or incidents from the period during which she still had hopes of a relationship with George Owen Cambridge. The vocabulary of fear she employs emphasizes how interactions between the sexes became, at least in the minds of some of those involved or observing, especially fraught with potential for materially damaging misconstruction and gossip. Burney's sister Susan, as Hester Davenport has noted, "expressed herself 'both scandalised and frightened' by [Guiffardière's] behaviour," a combination of responses that echoes Burney's own (65). Once Guiffardière had returned to the room and made Burney fear his suppositions, she felt trapped: "Late as it was, I did not dare offer to retire, lest he should charge me with staying for a Tête à Tête, & going when it was interrupted" (2:104).

If Burney found gossip (or the fear of gossip) about herself and single men a cause for irritation and anxiety, the behavior of the married Guiffardière could have been perhaps all the more embarrassing. What

Burney may have struggled with most, however, is not the impression that Guiffardière ever had a serious sexual interest in her (if she did ever believe this, the impression was fleeting), but rather the problem of how to *articulate* to Guiffardière her sense of the impropriety of his conduct. While others could misinterpret that conduct, the possibility of this is not really what bothers her once it has become clear that he is well known for his antics at court and indulged to boot: a few days after Guiffardière interrupts Burney's tête-à-tête with Greville, she witnessed a scene in which the clergyman teased the Princess Augusta in mildly suggestive style:

I was greatly surprised: I had not imagined any man, but the King or Prince of Wales, had ever ventured at a *badinage* of this sort with any of the Princesses; nor do I suppose any *other* man ever did: Mr. G: is a favourite so great with all the Royal Family, that he safely ventures upon whatever he pleases: & doubtless they find, in his courage & his rhodomontading, a novelty extremely amusing to them, or they would not fail to bring about a change.

For myself, I own, when I perceived in him this mode of conduct with the Princesses, I saw his flights, & his rattling, & his heroicks, in a light of mere innocent play, from exuberance of high spirits: & I looked upon them, & upon him, in a fairer light. (2:110)

Clark too draws attention to this passage, but sees it as an indication that, realizing she is not singled out by Guiffardière, Burney then regards him as less interesting, and thus "He soon cuts less of a figure in her narrative" ("Epistolarity," 199). Yet this moment of realization comes *before* some of the most trying scenes between Burney and Guiffardière, and her commentary on these reveals, I would argue, that her interest in him is not centered on a desire to write him into a novelistic seduction narrative in which she can figure as heroine, but is focused rather on the difficulties of articulating her own sensitivities about proper behavior to a man who is actually innocent of sexual designs.

After one scene of especially vehement "rhodomontading" in March 1787, in which Guiffardière both falls on his knees and, when she tries to leave the room, forces her back to her chair, Burney reconsiders her own conduct. She regrets "a check so rude & violent to the gaiety & entertainment of an acquaintance which had promised me my best amusement during our Winter campaigns," but resolves to put into practice "quite a new system; & instead of encouraging . . . every thing that could lead to vivacity

1 & spirit, I was fain to determine upon the most distant, & even forbidding
 2 demeanour." (2:121). After some months, during which this "new system"
 3 has puzzled and offended Guiffardière, he demands that Burney should
 4 "explain [her] late *chilling demeanour*." Burney is nonplussed: "I wished him
 5 rather to feel, than be told, the improprieties I meant to obviate" (2:238).
 6 The problem is that if Guiffardière does not "feel" these improprieties, Bur-
 7 ney needs to spell them out, but to do so is to reveal her own understanding
 8 of the sexual potential in his actions, something she cannot bring herself
 9 to do:

11 I quite languished to say to him the truth at once; that his sport, his spirit,
 12 & his society, would all be acceptable to me, would he but divest them of
 13 that redundancy of gallantry, which rendered them offensive to me—but I
 14 could only think *how* to say this,—I could not bring it out; his attestations
 15 of innocence made it seem shocking to *me* to have to censure him, & I felt
 16 it a sort of degradation of myself, to point out an impropriety that seemed
 quite out of his own ideas! (2:239)

17 Resorting to "general promises of becoming more *voluble*," Burney finds
 18 Guiffardière believes this amounts to "a sort of concession that I owed him
 19 some reparation for the disturbance I had caused him," an interpretation
 20 that she disclaims, only to find that "all his violence was resumed" (2:239).
 21 Encounters with Guiffardière become a testament to the degree to which
 22 human beings can misinterpret each other, a practical example of somatic
 23 illegibility, in which he claims to read Burney's demeanor correctly, while
 24 she emphatically denies his interpretation. Soon after this conversation,
 25 they have another in which Guiffardière asserts, "You well know you have
 26 treated me ill,—you know, & have acknowledged it!" To Burney's indig-
 27 nant, "When did I do what could never be done?" he responds, "I thought
 28 your *Eyes* said it, which is the same as the voice; your Eyes,—your look,
 29 & your manner,—all looked quite sorry that you had used me so ill." Bur-
 30 ney protests "It must be utterly impossible I should have had either looks
 31 or manner so foreign to my feelings" (2:244), and seems inclined to attri-
 32 bute his claims to his "strange" and "wild" character (2:246), rather than
 33 consider any further the opacity (or contrariness) of bodily signals. These
 34 signals, in her view, mark Guiffardière's actions toward her as improper,
 35 while she believes he is, in fact, "really innocent of all evil intention," leav-
 36 ing Burney "at a loss how to point out to him my dislike of his actual pro-
 37
 38
 39

ceedings, without appearing to harbour doubts which he might cast, to my infinite dismay, upon myself" (2:240). While she wishes to believe that her own "feelings and "manner" are consistent with one another, her difficulties with Guiffardière stem from the apparent disjunction between his manner, that of a distracted lover, and his feelings, those of a faithful husband; it is his devotion to his wife in her illness during the later months of 1787 shows him to him to Burney "in his fairest light" (2:269] and effectively curtails his "rhodomontading." Had his manner been consonant with his feelings—that is, had he been in reality the would-be lover his actions implied, "All difficulty would subside, however unpleasantly; for the abhorrence with which I should be filled, would remove from me all hesitation & fear" (2:240).

Such moments testify to Burney's anxious internal negotiations with the requirements of propriety. Such negotiations are, of course, entirely typical of her own heroines, and thus far the likeness between the writer and her creations holds good. This is not because such things helped her to "insulate herself from too much reality" or allowed her to indulge a fantasy of being the cynosure of all eyes. Rather, she resembles her heroines because her novels address questions that she had to address, questions about how women were to navigate through life, the court being an especially challenging and unfamiliar environment to navigate through. Indeed, Burney the writer could clearly see the narrative and dramatic potential of a figure like Guiffardière, but we need not regard the encounters she describes as compensatory. Her recognition that he did not present any actual threat exacerbates her difficulty rather than diminishes her interest, and what she offers her readers is not a would-be seduction narrative, but a "turbulent" character unable to appreciate the implications of his behavior. Characteristically, Burney recognizes the varying measures of comedy and distress such a character can cause: most frustratingly, he throws responsibility for the detection of sexual signals back onto a woman who cannot acknowledge, beyond the confines of her journal, that she understands such things.

Notes

1. *The Court Journals and Letters of Frances Burney*, ed. Peter Sabor, et al., 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 2011–), 2:69, hereafter cited parenthetically.

2. Burney became close to Mrs. Delany after they first met in January 1783; it was during a visit to her at Christmas in 1785 that Burney first met the queen.

3. Another key figure who advanced this view of Burney was the critic John Wilson Croker, who, in *Quarterly Review* 70 (1842), judged Burney insufferably egotistical. The *Diary and Letters of Madame d'Arblay*, for example, he saw as having "one single object, . . . namely, the glorification of Miss Fanny Burney—her talents—her taste—her sagacity—her wit—her manners—her temper—her delicacy—even her beauty—and, above all, her modesty!" (244–45).

4. *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs. Delany; with interesting Reminiscences of King George III and Queen Charlotte*, ed. Augusta, Lady Llanover, 6 vols., 2nd series (London: Richard Bentley, 1861–62), 3:361. Lady Llanover's hostility to Burney had its roots in the deterioration of Burney's relationship with her mother, Georgiana; for further details, see Hester Davenport, *Faithful Handmaid: Fanny Burney at the Court of King George III* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2000), 97–99. I am indebted to one of this essay's anonymous readers for the insight that this hostility may also have been strengthened by "the dalliance of Alexander Burney with Augusta, who might well have resented his attentions when it became clear that they were going nowhere."

5. Lorna J. Clark, "Epistolarity in Frances Burney," *Age of Johnson* 20 (2010): 216. See also Clark's essay, "Dating the Undated: Layers of Narrative in Frances Burney's *Court Journals*," *Lifewriting Annual* 3 (2012): 119–39, in which her discussion of the time lag in the composition of the court journals leads her to comment that "Croker's suggestion that Burney was writing a fiction in which she cast herself as heroine does not seem too far off the mark" (122).

6. Burney and the Reverend George Owen Cambridge had "carried out," in Peter Sabor's words, "a long and ultimately futile flirtation just before her appointment at court" (*Court Journals*, 1:36n168). Stephen Digby, disguised in earlier editions of the journals and letters as "Mr. Fairly," had been appointed the queen's vice-chamberlain in 1783. He and Burney became particularly close during the period of the king's illness in 1788–89, but later in 1789, he became engaged to Charlotte Gunning, to Burney's distress.

7. Joyce Hemlow, *The History of Fanny Burney* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1958), 202. For further detail about the complex composition of the court journals, see Clark, "Dating the Undated."

8. The modern edition replaces Austin Dobson's six-volume *Diary and Letters of Madame d'Arblay, 1778–1840* (1904–05). This superseded Charlotte Barrett's original edition of the journals and letters, *Diary and Letters of Madame d'Arblay*, 7 vols. (1842–47). Although Dobson provided a new introduction and commentary, however, "The text of his edition is otherwise identical with that of its precursor," bar a few unpublished letters included as appendices. See Peter Sabor's "History of the Manuscripts and Earlier Editions," *Court Journals*, 1:xxx.

9. Clark, in "Dating the Undated," explains that by December 1786, Burney was a full year behind in the composition of her journals, so it can be concluded these words were not written until the late autumn of 1787 (121–22).

10. As she writes a little later, "I was then too uncertain of any of my priveleges to assume a single one of them unauthorised by the Queen" (1:173), a determination

that leads to an “oppressive” scene in which Burney resists giving dinner to Madame la Fite and the German novelist Madame la Roche; both Miss Planta and, more significantly, the queen approve Burney’s “steadiness” on the occasion, however (1:176).

11. E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, in *The Population History of England 1541–1871: A Reconstruction* (1981; rep. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ., 2002), give the mean age of women at first marriage between 1750 and 1799 as twenty-four years and nine months (255).

12. Leonard Smelt was sub-governor to the royal princes and a friend of Burney’s father. His influence had been instrumental in securing her appointment. See *Court Journals*, ed. Sabor, 1:193n587 and n588.

13. Lorna Clark, “The Diarist as Novelist: Narrative Strategies in the Journals and Letters of Frances Burney,” *English Studies in Canada* 27 (2001): 290.

14. According to Burney’s summary of a typical day, tea would be between 8 and 9 p.m., after which the equerries would usually be summoned by the king to attend the daily concert (1:37).

15. Burney was far from alone in the relief she felt at Mrs. Schwellenberg’s absence; on hearing that she was to remain in town rather than accompany them back to Windsor in September 1786, Miss Planta, English teacher to the princesses, “made a sort of involuntary exclamation—‘Good God, Miss Burney, if Mrs. Schwellenberg was not so sick—& so cross—how happily we might all live!’” (1:178).

16. Of the tendency to refer to the equerries as “Beaus,” Hester Davenport, in *Faithful Handmaid*, notes that “there seems to have been a general archness between the women of the household and the Windsor uniforms,” but she also judges that the journals and letters “do not support the allegation that [Burney] thought herself the centre of their amorous attentions” (92).

17. John Gregory, *A Father’s Legacy to his Daughters* (Dublin, 1774), 17. Miranda Burgess, in “Courtling Ruin: The Economic Romances of Frances Burney,” *Novel* 28 (1995): 131–53, notes the contradiction by which Gregory repudiates affectation while effectively conceding that “in seeking a husband, it is better to assume false modesty than to be caught with one’s modesty down altogether” (134).

18. See Joyce Hemlow, “Fanny Burney and the Courtesy Books,” *PMLA* 65 (1950): 732–61. While Hemlow argued that Burney should be understood as a courtesy author, Burney’s use of such material is seen in ironic terms by later critics such as Kristina Straub, in *Divided Fictions: Fanny Burney and Feminine Strategy* (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky, 1987); Margaret Doody, in *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ., 1988); and Julia Epstein, in *The Iron Pen: Frances Burney and the Politics of Women’s Writing* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin, 1989).

19. It could also be argued that one of the generic features of the journal is that it makes the experience of its writer central, and thus “attention paid” to the author is likely to figure significantly.

20. Emily Hahn, *A Degree of Prudery: A Biography of Fanny Burney* (London: Arthur Baker, 1951), 223.

21. Equerries served a period of three months; as Hester Davenport, in *Faithful Handmaid*, notes, "One of the aspects of the tea-hour that Fanny at first disliked was that these 'Windsor uniforms' were always changing" (66).

22. On Burney's, and especially Susan's, use of codenames, see Clark, "Dating the Undated," 127–28 and n30.

23. English teacher to the princesses, Margaret ("Peggy") Planta was one of Burney's regular companions at court; apparently a good-natured but not sparkling character, she and Burney got on well, but she was no substitute for Susan and Fredy.

24. Doody, *Frances Burney*, 152. Burney thought the paragraph the work of William Weller Pepys, who she also believed had published a poem mentioning her name after the publication of *Evelina*; given evidence that the poem's author was, in fact, Burney's father, Doody asks, "Could Dr. Burney have been the author of this piece as well? . . . There is reason to imagine that whoever sent the paragraph into the newspaper did so in the hopes of pushing George Cambridge toward an honorable and open declaration. If that were the intention, the treatment did not take effect" (152).

25. Rudolf M. Dekker, "Sexuality, Elites, and Court Life in the Late Seventeenth Century: The Diaries of Contantijn Huygens, Jr.," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 23.3 (1999): 105. The teenage Marianne Port, as Hester Davenport notes in *Faithful Handmaid*, was a more obvious subject for gossip at court at this period: her attraction to the much older equerry Colonel Goldsworthy was clear to many, and disapproved by many as well. Susan Burney christened her "Friskitten," and Burney herself regretfully determined that Marianne was not a suitable match for the Lockes's son, William (93–98). See also *Court Journals*, ed. Sabor, 2:273–76. Given her dread of rumor, I think it ironic that in his hostile review of the *Diary and Letters*, Croker, in *Quarterly Review* 70, sees Burney herself as the worst kind of gossip, describing her as a "tale-bearer" and "a deliberate spy" (259).

